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# **Restructuring second-hand fashion from the consumption perspective**

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## 1 Introduction

The second-hand fashion market is gaining incredible momentum. Since the early 1990s, the industry has rapidly expanded due to heightened interest from consumers, investors and retailers (Hansen, 2010; NARTS, 2013). The number of second-hand, vintage, and thrift stores opening, particularly those offering online resale, is growing fast: besides Ebay, Facebook fleamarket groups also reach tens of thousands of consumers who are actively buying and selling used goods (Sihvonen & Turunen, 2016). The full size of the resale market is challenging to estimate, because actors in the market may also be private consumers. However, the evidence shows that high quality resale is a multi-billion dollar industry, and is among the fastest growing segments in retail (ThredUp, 2016).

In particular, the digitisation of exchange platforms has changed the rules of second-hand retail and empowered consumers to become sellers of fashion items too. This brings challenges to traditional clothing businesses (e.g. Ferraro, Sands & Brace-Govan, 2016). It appears that the growing consumer segment for second-hand fashion searches for something more than affordability and low prices; for many, second-hand consumption offers the end-value of individuality, the experience of treasure hunting, or that feel-good moment produced by reducing the environmental footprint and rescuing an item from landfill (e.g. Thomas, 2003; Guiot & Roux, 2010; Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015).

While second-hand markets have been rapidly growing, the research around this interesting phenomenon has started to attract a number of researchers from varied disciplines. Second-hand – or previously used and owned – goods and consumption have thus been explored in different empirical contexts, e.g. clothing, furniture and cars (e.g. Edbring, Lehner & Mont, 2016; Ferrero *et al.*, 2016) and by different disciplines, for instance marketing, consumer research, textile and clothing studies, design management, and social science studies (e.g. Cassidy & Bennett, 2012; Cervellon, Carey & Harms, 2012; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013). Prior investigations have explored the topic of second-hand fashion from different perspectives and levels of analysis, such as consumption, business, society, and culture (e.g. Isla, 2013; Xu, Chen, Burman & Zhao, 2014; Edbring *et al.*, 2016). While each of these discussions has made a valuable contribution to our understanding of second-hand and vintage markets and their consumers, a comprehensive overview of the research agenda covered in the existing publications has been lacking. In this chapter, we therefore present a synthesis of what is currently known about second-hand fashion and vintage consumption.

The purpose of this chapter is to restructure the existing literature on second-hand fashion consumption by exploring its conceptual relations, theoretical approaches, and empirical manifestations. The rest of the chapter is divided into three sections. The next section presents a literature review of the prior investigations concerning what has been studied in the field of second-hand fashion in general, and regarding second-hand luxury and vintage in particular. The

review summarises the major contributions as well as the applied constructs, research questions and theoretical underpinnings in this research area.

While this section stresses the perspective of an individual consumer, the following section widens the examination to the level of consumer society and culture. At this point, we take the consecutive processes of the consumption cycle - acquisition, consumption and possession, disposition, and production (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) - as theoretical lenses to explore the prior literature further. Illuminating the existing scholars from a macro perspective enables us to show which processes of the consumption cycle are connected to the existing discussions, and how.

In the concluding section, we discuss the theoretical and societal implications based on the literature review and make suggestions for future research areas. We emphasise that second-hand fashion seems to be repeating the logic of consumption and production by maintaining the cycle of consumption, and therefore, that the transforming role of second-hand fashion must be carefully considered alongside the boosters and hinderers of the circular economy.

## **2 Summary of the prior studies on second-hand fashion and vintage consumption**

A review of the prior academic literature was conducted in the field of second-hand and vintage consumption, focusing on fashion items. We searched for publications in the following electronic databases: Google Scholar, EBSCOhost Business Search Premier, and Science Direct. Search terms used included second-hand, vintage, fashion, luxury, disposing behaviour, and previously used goods and consumption. In the first phase, the literature searches resulted in the identification of 41 publications which were then explored and organised according to their publishing dates, contributors, key constructs, research questions, and the theoretical approaches they applied. After that, we focused in on peer-reviewed, academic journals on marketing and consumer behaviour and fashion management, and excluded all conference papers. Thus, the current review is not all-encompassing, but it covers the central publications in the chosen disciplines, and specifically, those which are cross-cited among researchers. Table 1 summarises the current state-of-the art of publications in the fields of consumer research and marketing.

**Table 1.** An overview of the prior second-hand fashion literature

\*\*\*\*INSERT TABLE 1 HERE \*\*\*\*

It was evident that the academic research on the topic has steadily grown since the beginning of 21st century, and that it began to grow rapidly after 2010. Our analysis initially focused on examining how the selected publications define second-cycle goods, and which constructs they use. We found that most of the studies lack clear definitions, and that often, second-cycle goods are aligned with previously used goods (e.g. Roux & Korchia, 2006; Ferraro *et al.*, 2016). The explicit differences between the second-hand and vintage constructs are only specified in a few academic papers. Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen (2015) present a conceptual analysis of the linkages between these two constructs. Based on prior investigations, they (*ibid.*, 59) define second-hand to include goods that have been used before, notwithstanding the age of the product, while vintage refers to previously owned, but not necessarily used, goods from a specific era. Cervellon *et al.* (2012) define the difference in relation to consumers' motivations, explicating that vintage goods are often bought as part of a treasure hunt, while second-hand shopping is driven by bargain hunting, frugality and economic motivations. It should however be noted that a few investigations discuss these constructs not as dichotomized, but rather, find them more overlapping in consumers' experiences (Bardhi & Arnould, 2005; Roux & Korchia, 2006). Thus, we can conclude that either the product-related factors or the motivational drivers are used to distinguish the second-hand and vintage constructs. However, the researchers have not reached a consensus on how the motivational basis varies between second-hand items and vintage items.

Secondly, we reviewed the research questions of the selected publications. It appeared that two major questions permeated the investigations: studies either explore consumers' motivations for buying and using second cycle products, or analyse the issue of second-hand and vintage in connection with fashion trends and consumption discourses. Regarding consumers' motivational drivers, our review identified a good number of publications which have examined this question, and found that motivations can be related either to product characteristics or to consumers' experiences (Guiot & Roux, 2010; Xu *et al.*, 2014). The findings concerning the product-related motivations are relatively solid: often, the motivational drivers are divided into economic motivations (i.e. price sensitivity, which is only relevant in the context of second-hand, not vintage) and critical motivations (ethical, ecological and sustainability drivers). Although sustainability is highlighted as a key critical motivation driving second-hand consumption in general, in examining second-hand luxury, the majority of studies have not yet found direct relationships between eco-consciousness and the desire to buy second-hand goods (Cervellon *et al.*, 2012; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Yan, Bae & Xu, 2015). Neither was sustainability shown to have a direct impact on the consumption of vintage in Cervellon *et al.*'s (2012) research. In

addition, particularly in the context of fashion, it has also been pointed out that fashionability or fashion motivations are driving characteristics, particularly in vintage and second-hand consumption (Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013; Ferraro *et al.*, 2016). The second group of motivations found among the publications is that of recreational drivers. These motivations are either linked to the purchasing experience, such as excitement and treasure- or bargain hunting (Bardhi & Arnould, 2005; Cervellon *et al.*, 2012; Ferraro *et al.*, 2016), or to the actual intended usage of pre-used goods, such as playfulness or identity manifestations (Roux & Korchia, 2006; Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013).

In addition to a strong motivational stream of research, a relatively small number of publications focus on second-hand and vintage consumption in relation to fashion paradigms and ongoing consumption discourses. These studies seek to explain the general attitudes and practices in relation to second-hand and vintage fashion, used clothes and sustainable modes of consumption. For instance, Cassidy and Bennett (2012) discuss how vintage has begun to emerge as a fashion trend in the UK, and Isla (2013) analyses how cultural discourses influence second-hand fashion consumption in the Philippines. Further, Edbring *et al.* (2016) thoroughly explore the attitudes and barriers towards the alternative modes of consumption, taking second-hand, access-based and collaborative consumption as empirical examples. Finally, Reiley and DeLong (2011) explicate how fashion consumption practices could be developed more sustainably. The overall conclusions made by these studies are that consumers are increasingly questioning throwaway fashion, and that attitudes towards second-hand and vintage fashion are more positive than before.

Finally, our literature review focused on the theoretical approaches used in the publications. Indeed, the topics have often been analysed alongside some other, often well-developed, theoretical discussions and concepts. The consumer theoretical frameworks applied are as follows: theory of reasoned action (Xu *et al.*, 2014), materialism and theory of shopping (Bardhi & Arnould, 2005; Guiot & Roux, 2010), identity and self-expression behaviours (Roux & Korchia, 2006; Cassidy & Bennett, 2012), second-hand and sustainable shopping behaviours (Cervellon *et al.*, 2012; Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015; Edbring *et al.*, 2016; Ferraro *et al.*, 2016), and perceived value (Sihvonen & Turunen, 2016). In the field of fashion studies, the topic has been explored in relation to postmodern theories of fashion (Isla, 2013), sustainability and ethical fashion consumption (Reiley & DeLong, 2011), and fashion and fashionability (Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013). The plurality of the theoretical approaches adopted in the prior work stresses the cross-disciplinary nature of second-hand and vintage consumption.

### 3 Second-hand luxury and vintage fashion along the consumption cycle

This chapter's attention now turns to a macro level perspective with the aim of building a more holistic understanding of how the discussions outlined so far can be positioned in relation to the consumption cycle (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). At this point, we explore the publications selected in the first review table and include a few additional studies primarily concerning clothing disposal behaviours. In the following analysis, we regard consumption cycle as a theoretical framework through which it is possible to illuminate the processes involved in the managerial and socio-economic activities of acquisition, consumption and possession, disposition, and production (Arnould *et al.*, 2005; Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

\*\*\* INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE \*\*\*

**Figure 1.** The 'second' cycle of consumption (modified from Arnould *et al.*, 2005: 11)

Figure 1 illustrates the 'second' cycle of consumption, specifying the roles and consumption practices that consumers adopt during this process. Leaning on Arnould *et al.*'s (2005, 11-15) presentation, the figure specifies all the practices that may take place when goods are consumed for a second time. It is assumed that the item is acquired from a third-party operator, either from a consumer-seller or from a firm operating in the C2B2C markets, instead of from its original manufacturer/retailer. Having examined prior investigations in relation to these phases, it can be confirmed that most prior studies have focused on the phases of acquisition, possessing or disposition, while production practices have received less attention. However, the division between the processes is not straightforward, because consumers' roles as sellers, buyers, users and disposers overlap in the studies which makes it difficult to situate each publication into a specific single phase of consumption. Therefore, the figure also depicts the phases of consumption as interrelated circles. Below, we take a more specific look at each of the phases of consumption cycle and exemplify how prior works relate to them.

Firstly, the studies concentrating on the processes of *acquisition* examine the exchange behaviours connected to symbolic and experiential aspects and socio-cultural complexities (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The current literature review has found that prior studies have tended to focus on purchasing practices of second-hand fashion items, ignoring other practices of acquiring such as receiving, finding and inheriting. As was discussed above, studies have looked for evidence on what motivates consumers to buy second-hand products (e.g. Roux & Korchia, 2006; Bardhi & Arnould, 2005; Guiot & Roux, 2010; Ferraro *et al.*, 2016). While the practices and motivations of purchasing second-hand objects have received considerable attention, only a few studies so far have focused on consumers' acquisition of vintage fashion. One exception is the study by Cervellon *et al.* (2012) in which the authors analyse the relationship between

second-hand and vintage, concluding that the purchasing of second-hand items is primarily connected to the need to be economical and ecological, while the motivations of expressing oneself and being attached to fashion drives consumers to acquire vintage (ibid.).

Traditionally, the second phase of the consumption cycle, that of *consumption and possession*, has been widely explored in the field of consumer research (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Also, the current literature review shows that prior works have vividly discussed consumers' possessing. Often, the different aspects of possessing are discussed generally, and the specific practices of wearing, displaying, sharing and storing are not explicated. Collecting behaviours are, however, an exception, being the focus of several prior investigations (Gervail, 2008; Zonneveld & Biggemann, 2014). Regarding vintage and retro items, prior studies have explored, for instance, vintage consumption habits (Cassidy & Bennett, 2012) as well as the possessing of vintage fashion from the viewpoint of consumer identity (Veenstra & Kuipers, 2013). Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen (2015) focus on second-hand luxury and analyse the meanings that consumers attach to their possession of previously used luxury goods. Seeking to understand what makes someone's trash another's treasure, their findings show that consumers' motivations vary between self- and other-related dimensions in the case of second-hand luxury possessions.

The third group of prior studies are those focusing on the phase of *disposal behaviours*. Unlike consumption research in general, disposition behaviours have received considerable attention in the context of second-hand and vintage goods, offering valuable viewpoints in sustainable consumption and marketing (Morgan & Britwistle, 2009; Lang *et al.*, 2013; Laitala, 2014). Laitala (2014) presents a conceptual overview of consumers' clothing disposal during the past 30 years and defines disposal as "the act of getting rid of something, i.e. the end of life stage of the clothing with the present owner, regardless of whether the clothing is discarded as waste or delivered to recycling or reuse" (ibid., p. 444). Prior studies have exemplified various disposal behaviours; for instance, Joung and Park-Poaps (2013) differentiate between the practices of resale, reuse, and donation in their efforts to exemplify consumers' motivations behind each of those behaviours. Similar questions are explored by Bianchi and Britwistle (2010; 2012), with the focus on sustainable clothing disposal behaviour. It is concluded that consumers' recycling behaviour and environmental concerns influence their willingness to donate used clothes to charity. These discussions have emphasised second-hand items, ignoring vintage pieces and luxury items altogether. Nevertheless, consumers do sell second-hand luxury and vintage fashion to other consumers and intermediary firms, and so far, studies exploring the reasons and practices as to why and how the disposer consumer is passing on unique pieces of second-hand or vintage products have been lacking.

Finally, the *production* phase of the consumption cycle stresses that consumers may take active roles as marketers and sellers of their previously used products. It also shows how consumers participate in the processes of meaning making, maintaining and transforming the symbolic meanings related to second-hand consumption and fashion markets within their socio-cultural



surroundings. To date, the productive aspects of fashion consumption have been substantially explored from the viewpoint of ethical fashion (Reiley & DeLong, 2011), slow fashion (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013) and resistance to dominant fashion norms (Thompson & Haytko, 1997), but not precisely in the context of second-hand consumption and vintage. As an exception, Isla (2013) adopts this kind of cultural approach to second-hand fashion and investigates the discourses of second-hand clothing trade and consumption in the Philippines. Bringing forward opinions from both second-hand consumers and store owners, she shows how the fashion paradigms of modern and functional and postmodern and constructionist appear in the markets, and how the actors actively reshape the meanings within these paradigms.

In conclusion, most prior studies discussing second-hand fashion consumption have examined the phenomenon within a single phase of consumption, although the phases of consumption cycle may overlap in particular examinations. Our analysis shows that the processes of acquiring, possessing and disposing of the “second” cycle of consumption have been explored quite a lot, while the domain of production has virtually been ignored. When looking at the emphases in prior discussions separately from the viewpoint of the theoretical constructs of second-hand and vintage, even more differences emerge. Vintage items have been examined mostly in terms of possessing practices, while second-hand goods have dominated in the studies that explore acquiring and disposal practices.

#### **4 Conclusion**

This chapter has looked at the current state of consumer behaviour and marketing literature in its discussions of second-hand fashion consumption. The literature review revealed that the topics of second-hand and vintage have attracted increasing consumer research since the turn of the new century.

Taking the viewpoint of the individual consumer, the literature analysis uncovered the plurality of theoretical approaches applied in the context of second-hand and vintage fashion. As no established frameworks are used in the field, conceptual clarity is also lacking. Our review points out some areas of overlap when defining the constructs, particularly when second-hand and vintage were discussed separately, and not challenged against each other (e.g. Guiot & Roux, 2010; Reiley & DeLong, 2011; Cassidy & Bennett, 2012; Xu *et al.*, 2014). While second-hand includes goods that have been used before, regardless of the product’s age, vintage refers to previously owned, but not necessarily used, goods from a specific era. Second-hand luxury, for one, is a rather vague term that holds interrelated and overlapping meanings with second-hand goods and vintage (Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015, 59). As a general expression for all the items that are acquired from a third-party operator, either from a consumer-seller or from a firm operating in the C2B2C markets rather than from their original manufacturer/retailer, we propose the term ‘second cycle products’. In so doing, it is stressed that second cycle products do not

necessarily have to have been used before, but they do have to be pre-owned (Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015).

When examining these publications from the macro-level perspective, we found that the prior literature has covered the acquisition, possessing and disposing aspects along the ‘second’ cycle of consumption, but that the phase of production has received relatively little attention so far. Further, we identified differences with regard to the treatment of second-hand goods and vintage items, as second-hand goods are examined in connection with acquiring and disposing of them, while vintage items are thoroughly explored from the viewpoint of possessing practices. Consequently, we recognise some specific areas of research that would strengthen the prevailing understanding of second-hand and vintage consumption. For instance, the prior investigations lack the understanding of when, how and why consumers are willing to dispose of ‘valuable’, i.e. second-hand luxury and vintage, products. Therefore, we call for further research into aspects of disposing in the context of second-hand luxury and vintage. Moreover, we suggest further exploration of the productive aspects of consuming second-hand and vintage. For example, how are the symbolic and socio-cultural meanings of second-hand and vintage consumption developed, maintained and reshaped by the consumers and producers in the markets? Advertisements, brands, retail environments, and media texts may serve as empirical areas in which the negotiating processes of these meanings could be analysed.

Finally, we argue that the vast majority of previous studies have explored the phenomena by stressing single phases of the consumption cycle, focusing either on the acquisition, possessing, or disposing of the second cycle products. Adapting such narrow and isolated perspectives is a shortcoming from the viewpoint of sustainable consumption, and can bring pitfalls. When the focus is placed on a single phase of the consumption cycle, the wider institutional and socio-cultural structures that govern the processes of consumption, markets and consumption practices are easily ignored. In particular, if we look at the phase of disposal (e.g. the practices and motives for recycling), the danger arises that we neglect the practices that take place after that in the phase of acquisition. The same consumers who actively recycle or donate their used clothes may end up buying more and more new clothes, and thus the ‘second’ cycle of consumption is maintained without any actual changes in consumption practices. The ‘second’ cycle of consumption is, then, a self-sustaining process that supports both consumers’ and producers’ desires for fast fashion (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Lundblad & Davies, 2016).

To overcome these pitfalls, we call for further research exploring the second cycle of consumption as whole. Taking culturally oriented perspectives, these new investigations may critically analyse the socio-cultural processes that drive the consumption cycle and explore how the single phases interrelate to, and influence, each other. In agreement with Edbring *et al.* (2016), we see a need to understand the processes of circular economy and how it works in the context of clothing and fashion markets in order to boost sustainable consumption and production in this industry.

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